











# TRAVELS

IN THE

## STEPPES OF THE CASPIAN SEA,

THE CRIMEA, THE CAUCASUS, &c.

BY

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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WHEN I left Constantinople for Odessa my principal object was to investigate the geology of the Crimea and of New Russia, and to arrive by positive observations at the solution of the great question of the rupture of the Bosphorus. Having once entered on this pursuit, I was soon led beyond the limits of the plan I had marked out for myself, and found it incumbent on me to examine all the vast regions that extend between the Danube and the Caspian Sea to the foot of the northern slope of the Caucasus. I spent, therefore, nearly five years in Southern Russia, traversing the country in all directions, exploring the course of rivers and streams on foot or on horseback, and visiting all the Russian coasts of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azof and the Caspian. Twice I was intrusted by the Russian government with important scientific and industrial missions; I enjoyed special protection and assistance during all my travels, and I am happy to be able to testify in this place my gratitude to Count Voronzof, and to all those who so amply seconded me in my laborious investigations.

Thus protected by the local authorities, I was enabled to collect the most authentic information respecting the state of men and things. Hence I was naturally led to superadd to my scientific pursuits considerations of all kinds connected with the history, statistics, and actual condition of the various races inhabiting Southern Russia. I was, moreover, strongly encouraged in my new task by the desire to make known in their true light all those southern regions of the empire which have played so important a part in the history of Russia since the days of Peter the Great.

My wife, who braved all hardships to accompany me in most of my journeys, has also been the partner of my literary labours in France. To her belongs all the descriptive part of this book of travels.

Our work is published under no man's patronage; we have kept ourselves independent of all extraneous influence; and in frankly pointing out what struck us as faulty in the social institutions of the Muscovite empire, we think we evince our gratitude for the hospitable treatment we received in Russia, better than some travellers of our day, whose pages are only filled with exaggerated and ridiculous flatteries.

XAVIER HOMMEIRE DE HELL.



## DEFINITIONS.

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*Geographic miles* are of 15 to a degree of the equator.

A Russian Verst ( $104 \frac{3}{16}$  to a degree), is  $\frac{1}{7}$  of a geographical mile,  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a French league of 25 to a degree. It is equal to 3484·9 English feet, or nearly  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a statute mile. It is divided into 500 *sazhenes*, and each of these into 3 *arshines*.

A *deciatine* (superficial measure) is equivalent to 2 acres, 2 roods, 32 perches, English.

A *pood* is equal to 40 Russian or 36 English pounds.

100 *tehetverts* (corn measure) are equal to about  $74\frac{1}{2}$  English quarters.

A *vedro* (liquid measure) contains  $3\frac{1}{4}$  English gallons, or  $12\frac{1}{4}$  Litres.

Since 1839 the paper ruble has been suppressed, and has given place to the silver ruble. But the former is always to be understood wherever the word ruble occurs in the following pages. The paper ruble is worth from 1 fr. 10c. to 1 fr. 18c. according to the course of exchange; the silver ruble is equal to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  paper rubles.

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A French *hectare* is equal to 2 acres, 1 rood, 33 perches, English.

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THE

STEPPES OF THE CASPIAN SEA, &c.

CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE FROM CONSTANTINOPLE—ARRIVAL IN ODESSA—QUARANTINE.

ON the 15th of May, 1838, we bade adieu to Constantinople, and standing on the deck of the Odessa steamer, as it entered the Bosphorus, we could not withdraw our eyes from the magnificent panorama we were leaving behind us.

Constantinople then appeared to us in all its grandeur and beauty. Seated like Rome on its seven hills, exercising its sovereignty like Corinth over two seas, the vast city presented to our eyes a superb amphitheatre of palaces, mosques, white minarets and green plane-trees glistening in an Asiatic sunshine. What description could adequately depict this marvellous spectacle, or even give an idea of it? Would it not be wronging creation, as Lamartine has said, to compare Constantinople with any thing else in this world?

Meanwhile, we were advancing up the Bosphorus, and the two shores, fringed all along to the Black Sea with cypress groves, and half hidden beneath their sombre shade, invited a share of that attentive gaze we had hitherto bestowed only on the great city that was vanishing in our wake. The Bosphorus itself presented a very animated scene. A thousand white-sailed caiques glided lightly over the waves, coming and going incessantly from shore to shore. As we advanced, the Bosphorus widened more and more, and we soon entered that Black Sea, whose ominous name so well accords with the storms that perpetually convulse it. A multitude of vessels of all kinds and dimensions, were anchored at the entrance of the channel, waiting for a favourable wind to take them out of the straits, which alone present more dangers than the whole navigation of the Black Sea. The difficulties of this passage are further augmented in the beginning of spring and the end of autumn by dense fogs, which have caused an incalculable number of vessels to be wrecked on the steep rocks of these iron-bound coasts.

The passage from Constantinople to Odessa is effected in fifty hours in the Russian steamers, which ply twice a month from each of these ports. Those who are accustomed to the comfort, elegance, and scrupulous cleanliness of the Mediterranean and Atlantic steamers, must be horrified at finding themselves on board a Russian vessel. It is impossible to express the filth and disorder of that in which we were embarked. The deck, which was already heaped from end to end with goods and provisions, was crowded besides with a disgusting mob of pilgrims, mendicant monks, Jews, and Russian or Cossack women, all squatting and lying about at their ease without regard to the convenience of the other passengers. Most of them were returning from Jerusalem. The Russian people are possessed in the highest degree with the mania for pilgrimages. All these beggars set off barefooted, with their wallets on their backs, and their rosaries in their hands, to seek Heaven's pardon for their sins; appealing on their way to the charity of men, to enable them to continue that vagabond and miserable life which they prefer to the fulfilment of homely duties.

It was a sorry specimen of the people we were going to visit that we had thus before our eyes, and our repugnance to these Muscovites was all the stronger from our recollections of the Turks, whose noble presence and beauty had so lately engaged our admiration.

On the morning of the second day, we saw on our left a little island called by the sailors the Island of Serpents. The Russians have retained its Greek name, of Fidonisi. It was anciently called Leucaia, or Makaron Nésos (Island of the Blest), was sacred to Achilles, and contained a temple, in which mariners used to deposit offerings. It is a calcareous rock, about thirty yards high and not more than 600 in its greatest diameter, and has long been uninhabited. Some ruins still visible upon it would probably be worth exploring, if we may judge from an inscription already discovered.

Soon afterwards we were made aware of our approach to Odessa, our place of destination, by the appearance of the Russian coast with its cliffs striated horizontally in red and white. Nothing can be more dreary than these low, deserted, and monotonous coasts, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, until they are lost in the hazy horizon. There is no vegetation, no variety in the scene, no trace of human habitation; but everywhere a calcareous and argillaceous wall thirty or forty yards high, with an arid sandy beach at its foot, continually swept bare by the waves. But as we approached nearer to Odessa, the shore assumed a more varied appearance. Huge masses of limestone and earth, separated ages ago from the line of the cliffs, form a range of hills all along the sea border, planted with trees and studded with charming country-houses.

A lighthouse, at some distance from the walls of Odessa, is the first landmark noted by mariners. An hour after it came in sight, we were in front of the town. Europe was once more before our eyes, and the aspect of the straight lines of street, the wide fronted

houses, and the sober aspect of the buildings awoke many dear recollections in our minds. Every object appeared to us in old familiar hues and forms, which time and absence had for a while effaced from our memories. Even Constantinople, which so lately had filled our imaginations, was now thought of but as a brilliant mirage which had met our view by chance, and soon vanished with all its illusive splendours.

Odessa looks to great advantage from the quarantine harbour, where the steamer moored. The eye takes in at one view the boulevard, the Exchange, Count Voronzof's palace, the *pratique* harbour, and the Custom-house ; and, in the background, some churches with green roofs and gilded domes, the theatre, Count de Witt's pretty Gothic house, and some large barracks, which from their Grecian architecture, one would be disposed to take for ancient monuments.

Behind the Custom-house, on some steep calcareous rocks, sixty or seventy feet high, stands the quarantine establishment, looking proudly down on all Odessa. A fortress and bastions crowning the height, protect the town. All the remarkable buildings are thus within view of the port, and give the town at first sight an appearance of grandeur that is very striking.

The day of our arrival was a Sunday ; and when we entered the harbour, it was about four in the afternoon, the hour of the promenade, and all that portion of the town adjoining the port presented the most picturesque appearance imaginable. We had no difficulty in distinguishing the numerous promenaders that filled the alleys of the boulevard, and we heard the noise of the droshkys and four-horse equipages that rolled in every direction. The music, too, of a military band stationed in the middle of the promenade, distinctly reached our ears, and heightened the charms of the scene. It was, indeed, a European town we beheld, full of affluence, movement, and gaiety. But, alas ! our curiosity and our longings, thus strongly excited, were not for a long while to be satisfied. The dreaded quarantine looked down on us, as if to notify that its rights were paramount, and assuredly it was not disposed to abrogate them in our favour. One of the officers belonging to it had already come down to receive the letters, journals, and passports, and to order us into a large wooden house, placed like a watchful sentinel on the verge of the sea. So we were forced to quit the brilliant spectacle on which we had been gazing, and go and pass through certain preliminary formalities in a smoky room, filled with sailors and passengers, waiting their turn with the usual apathy of Russians.

We had no sooner entered the quarantine, than we were separated from each other, and every one made as much haste to avoid us, as if we were unfortunate pariahs whose touch was uncleanness. All our baggage was put aside for four-and-twenty hours, and we were accommodated in the meantime with the loan of garments, so grotesque and ridiculous, that after we had got into them, we could not look at each other without bursting into laughter. We made



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THE STEPPES OF THE CASPIAN SEA, &C.

haste to inspect our chambers, which we found miraculously furnished with the most indispensable things. But what rejoiced us above all, was a court-yard adorned with two beautiful acacias, the flowery branches of which threw their shade upon our windows. Our guardian, who had been unable to preserve the usual gravity of a Russian soldier at the sight of our ludicrous *travestissement*, surprised us greatly by a few words of French which he addressed to

## LAZARET OF ODESSA.

delicious perfume. Odessa is full of these trees, and when they are covered with their odorous blossoms, the streets, the squares, and even the meanest quarters, put on a charming gala aspect; the whole town is metamorphosed into a smiling garden.

We feel bound to testify to the excellent arrangements of the quarantine establishment, and to the ready, obliging disposition of its officers. Though placed in such propinquity to Constantinople, the Odessa lazaret may serve as a model of its kind, and the excellence of the system observed in it is proved by the happy results obtained. Travellers are subjected to a quarantine of a fortnight only, and merchandise, after undergoing forty-eight hours' fumigation with preparations of chlorine, is immediately set free; yet since the existence of this establishment, there has not occurred in Odessa a single case of plague which could be ascribed to any defect in the sanatory regulations of the place. There is no denying the fact that in matters of quarantine, France remains in the extreme background. The lazaret of Marseilles, is at this day exactly what it was at the beginning of the last century. All our discoveries in chemistry and medicine have been of no avail against the inveterate force of old habits; and up to the present time, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of commercial men, it has been impossible to modify the sanatory regulations enforced in our Mediterranean ports. Marseilles is 600 leagues away from the countries ravaged by the plague, and yet vessels are subjected there, after five-and-twenty days' navigation, to a quarantine of forty-five days, and their cargoes are exposed in the open air for the same period. It has been frequently proposed to establish a new system, more in accordance with the advanced state of our knowledge; but it seems that the efforts of the government have always been defeated by the prejudices of the inhabitants of the south.

## CHAPTER II.

STREETS OF ODESSA—JEWS—HOTELS—PARTIALITY OF THE RUSSIANS FOR ODESSA—  
HURRICANE, DUST, MUD, CLIMATE, &c.—PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

THE day of our release from quarantine, was as full of bustle and annoyances as that of our arrival, the *spolio* alone excepted. How we regretted the freedom of the East! There the traveller's movements are shackled by no formalities, but he is free from the moment he quits his vessel, to roam about the town as he pleases, without being pestered with the custom-house and police officers, and the *employés* of all sorts that assail him in lands calling themselves civilised. But it is in Russia especially that he has most reason to pour out his wrathful imprecations on that army of birds of prey

that pounce on him with an avidity truly intolerable. I can't tell how many formalities we had to go through from the hour appointed for our leaving the lazaret, until we finally got out of the clutches of the Custom-house, and could breathe freely. But our feelings of vexation, strong as they were, gave way to downright stupefaction, when we entered the town. Was this really that Odessa which had seemed so brilliant when we saw it from the lazaret, and which now presented itself to our eyes under so mean and wretched an aspect? Could we even grace with the name of town the place where we then were and the streets we beheld? It was a great open space without houses, filled with carts, and oxen rolling in the dust, in company with a mob of Russian and Polish peasants, all sleeping together in the sun, in a temperature of more than 90°.

Whirlwinds of dust exactly like waterspouts in all but the material composing them, darkened the air every moment, and swept the ground with incredible fury. Further on, we entered a street wider than our highways in France, and flanked with little houses, one story high, and separated from each other by uncultivated gardens. The population consisting of Jews, whose filth is become proverbial in Russia, completed our disgust, and we knew not which way to turn our eyes to escape the sight of such loathsome objects. However, as we approached the heart of the town the streets began to show shops and houses, and the appearance of the inhabitants grew more diversified. But notwithstanding the carriages and droshkys that passed us rapidly, notwithstanding the footways of cut stone, and the Grecian architecture of the corn stores, we reached the Hotel de la Nouvelle Russie without having been able to reconcile ourselves to the aspect of the town; and there again we encountered fresh disappointments. We had been told by many of our acquaintances in Constantinople that the hotels of Odessa were among the best in Europe; great, therefore, was our surprise at not finding any one of the commonest requisites for travellers in the one at which we stopped. No linen, no bells, no servants to wait on us; it was with difficulty we could get a carafe of water after waiting for it half an hour. Our single apartment looked due south, and all the furniture in it consisted of a bedstead, a chest of drawers, and a few chairs, without a scrap of curtain to mitigate the blazing sunshine that scorched our eyes. And for such accomodation as this we had to pay eight rubles a day. But our amazement reached the highest pitch, when, after giving orders to fit up the bedstead which made so pitceous a figure in this agreeable lodging, we were informed by the hotel keeper that every article was charged for separately. "What!" I exclaimed, in great indignation, "do we not pay eight rubles a day?" "Certainly, madame, but accessories are never included in the charge for the room. But if madame don't like, there is no need to have a bed furnished completely. We have generals and countesses that are satisfied with a plain mattress." We had no desire to follow the example of their Excellencies, so we were obliged

to submit to our host's terms: It is fair to add, however, that circumstances to a certain extent justified some exorbitance of charge, for the Emperor Nicholas and his family were hourly expected, and the hotels were of course thronged with military men and strangers.

Odessa now lays claim to a respectable rank among the towns of Europe. Its position on the Black Sea, the rapid increase of its population, its commercial wealth, and its brilliant society, all concur to place it next in Russia after the two capitals of the empire. Though but forty years have elapsed since its foundation, it has far outstripped those half-Sclavonic, half-Tartar cities, Kiev the holy, the great Novgorod, and Vladimir, all celebrated in the bloody annals of the tzars, and already old before Moscow and St. Petersburg were yet in existence.

Odessa is not at all like any of the other towns in the empire. In it you hear every language and see all kinds of usages except those of the country. Nevertheless, the Russians prefer it even to St. Petersburg, for they enjoy greater liberty in it, and are relieved from the rigorous etiquette that engrosses three-fourths of their time in the capital. Besides this, Odessa possesses one grand attraction for the Russian and Polish ladies in the freedom of its port, which enables them to indulge their taste for dress and other luxuries without the ruinous expense these entail on them in St. Petersburg. Odessa is their Paris, which they are all bent on visiting at least once in their lives, whatever be the distance they have to travel. The reputation of the town has even passed the Russian frontiers, and people have been so obliging as to bestow on it the flattering name of the *Russian Florence*; but for what reason I really cannot tell. Odessa possesses neither arts nor artists; even the dilettante class is scarcely known there; the predominant spirit of trade leaves little room for a love of the beautiful, and the commercial men care very little about art. It is true that M. Vital, a distinguished French painter, has endeavoured to establish a drawing-academy under the patronage of Count Voronzof, but the success of his efforts may be doubted.

The infatuated admiration of the Russians for Odessa is carried to the utmost extreme, and they cannot understand how a stranger can fail to share in it. How indeed can any one refuse to be enraptured with a town that possesses an Italian opera, fashionable shops, wide footways, an English club, a boulevard, a statue, two or three paved streets, &c.? Barbarian taste or envy could alone behold all this without admiration. After all, this enthusiasm of the Russians may be easily accounted for: accustomed as they are to their wildernesses of snow and mud, Odessa is for them a real Eldorado comprising all the seductions and pleasures of the world.

If you will believe the Russians, snow is a thing of rare occurrence there, and every winter they wonder in all sincerity at the reappearance of sledges in the streets. But this does not hinder the thermometer from remaining steadily for several months at 25° or

26° R. below zero, and the whole sea from becoming one polished sheet of ice; nor does it dispense with the necessity of having double windows, stoves, and pelisses, just as in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Great, therefore, is the surprise of the traveller, who, on the strength of its flattering *sobriquet*, expects to find an Italian sun in Odessa, and who meets at every step nothing but frost-bitten faces and sledges. Besides these wintry rigours, there are the hurricanes that continually desolate the whole region, during what is elsewhere called the fine season. And these vicissitudes of the atmosphere are aggravated by another evil still more distressing, the dust, namely, which makes the town almost uninhabitable during a part of the year. Dust is here a real calamity, a fiend-like persecutor, that allows you not a moment's rest. It spreads out in seas and billows that rise with the least breath of wind, and envelop you with increasing fury, until you are stifled and blinded, and incapable of a single movement. The gusts of wind are so violent and sudden as to baffle every precaution. It is only at sunset that one can venture out at last to breathe the sea air on the boulevard, or to walk in the Rue Richelieu, the wide footways of which are then thronged by all the fashion of the place.

Many natural causes combine to keep up this terrible plague. First, the argillaceous soil, the dryness of the air, the force of the wind, and the width of the streets; then the bad paving, the great extent of uncultivated ground still within the town, and the prodigious number of carriages. The local administration has tried all imaginable systems, with the hope of getting rid of the dust, and has even had stones brought from Italy to pave certain streets, but all its efforts have been ineffectual. At last, in a fit of despair, it fell upon the notable device of macadamising the well-paved Rue Italienne and Rue Richelieu. The only result of this operation was, of course, prodigiously to increase the evil. A wood paving, to be laid down by a Frenchman, is now talked of, and it appears that his first attempts have been quite successful.

In order to give some idea of the violence of the hurricanes to which the country is subject, I will mention a phenomenon of which I was myself a witness. After a very hot day in 1840, the air of Odessa gradually darkened about four in the afternoon, until it was impossible to see twenty paces before one. The oppressive feel of the atmosphere, the dead calm, and the portentous colour of the sky, filled every one with deep consternation, and seemed to betoken some fearful catastrophe. For an hour and a half the spectator could watch the progress of this novel eclipse, which as yet was without a precedent in those parts. The thermometer attained the enormous height of 104° F. The obscurity was then complete; presently the most furious tempest imagination can conceive, burst forth, and when the darkness cleared off, there was seen over the sea, what looked like a water-spout of prodigious depth and breadth, suspended at a height of several feet above the

water, and moving slowly away until it dispersed at last at a distance of many miles from the shore. The eclipse and the waterspout were nothing else than dust, and that day Odessa was swept cleaner than it will probably ever be again.

During the winter the dust is changed into liquid mud, in

this promenade is the most fashionable quarter. The theatre, the exchange, the mansions of Count Voronzof and the Princess Narishkin; a line of very elegant houses, and the throng of carriages, all bespeak the presence of the aristocracy. Workmen have been employed for the last two or three years in constructing a gigantic staircase, to lead by a very gentle descent from the Boulevard to the sea-beach. This expensive and useless toy, is likely to cost nearly forty-thousand pounds. It is intended to be ornamented with vases and statues; but some considerable fissures already give reason to fear the speedy destruction of this great staircase, which after all can never be of any use, except to the promenaders on the Boulevard.

### CHAPTER III.

THE IMPERIAL FAMILY IN ODESSA—CHURCH MUSIC—SOCIETY OF THE PLACE, COUNT AND COUNTESS VORONZOF—ANECDOTE OF THE COUNTESS BRANISKA—THE THEATRE—THEATRICAL ROW.

THE brilliant fêtes that took place on the arrival of the imperial family, happened most opportunely for us, and enabled us to see many celebrated personages. All the foreigners of distinction who had been present at the famous review of Vosnecensk, followed the emperor to Odessa, and prolonged their stay there after his departure. The whole town was in revolution. The houses of dubious colour were most carefully re-coated, and even oldtumbling walls were plastered and coloured. The Deum was chanted in the cathedral the day their majesties arrived; the emperor and his eldest son attended, and were met at the great doors by the whole Russian clergy dressed in their richest robes, and headed by the archbishop. The emperor was accompanied by a long-train of courtiers and officers, whose golden embroideries and glittering decorations vied in splendour with the magnificent costumes of the popes and choristers. The Te Deum appeared to me incomparably beautiful. Whoever would know the full power of harmony, should hear the religious music of the Russians. The notes are so full, so grave, of such thrilling sweetness, and such extraordinary volume, and all the voices, seeming as though they issued from the depths of the building, accord so admirably with each other, that no language can express the effect of that mighty music and the profound emotion it excites. I had often heard enthusiastic accounts of the Russian church-singing, but all fell far short of what I then heard. After the Te Deum the archbishop presented his episcopal ring to the czar and the grand duke, who kissed it respectfully. The imperial party then left the cathedral, which was filled with clouds of incense. The vast throng, assembled in front of the building, dispersed in silence, without pres-

sure or confusion; and the interference of the Cossacks, appointed to maintain order, was not for a moment requisite.

In the evening there was a grand illumination, the empress held a drawing-room, and there was an extraordinary representation at the theatre, at which the whole imperial family was present. It was noticed that during the whole evening, the emperor sat behind the empress and did not once advance to the front of the box. There was therefore not a single hurrah, but every one seemed to affect ignorance of his majesty's presence. Next day the merchants gave a grand ball to the imperial family. It was a very brilliant assemblage: the exchange-rooms were all full of Highnesses and Excellencies, and the poor merchants cut but a sorry figure amongst all the embroidered uniforms, the wearers of which elbowed and pushed them aside contemptuously. With an excessive devotion to etiquette, they had adopted knee-breeches, cocked-hats, and a *soi-disant* uniform, with swords at their sides; but this costume was far less becoming than the black dress which they would certainly have done better in retaining. A boudoir all lined with vines had been constructed for the empress, and the fine clusters of grapes hung from the branches as if to invite her royal hand to pluck them.

The imperial family remained but five or six days in Odessa, and then proceeded in a steamer to the Crimea. Their presence in the town produced on the whole a very favourable impression.

It remains for us to say a few words respecting the society to be met with in Odessa. It consists of so many heterogeneous elements, that it possesses no distinctive character of its own; French, Germans, Russians, English, Greeks, and Italians, all bring to it their respective opinions, habits, language, interests, and prejudices. The Countess Voronzof's drawing-rooms are the general rendezvous of that aristocratic, commercial, and travelling world, which is to be found in similar admixture only in some of the towns of Italy. The same confusion prevails among the women; the noble and proud Narishkin may be seen there side by side with a broker's wife: pure blood, mixed blood, all shades, all tones, all possible physiognomies are there assembled together.

Count Voronzof is a veritable *grand seigneur*, and spends more than £6000 a year in pomps and entertainments. His name, his immense fortune, and his influence at court give him the predominance over most of the emperor's favourites. Brought up in England, where his father was ambassador for more than forty years, he seems more an Englishman than a Russian, and has retained nothing of his nationality except his devoted loyalty to the emperor, and the exquisite politeness that distinguishes the Russian nobles. His talents, his affability, and great facility of character, secure him numerous admirers amongst the Odessians and foreigners. Nicholas could not have made a better choice than in selecting him for governor of New Russia. His sumptuous tastes and vast wealth give great *éclat* to the rank he fills, and put him on a par



with the most magnificent lords of Europe. His wife is the daughter of the celebrated Countess Braniska, whose gigantic fortune was long an object of astonishment to the Russians themselves. She died but recently at the age of ninety-five, leaving her immense fortune to her only son, with the exception only of a fourteenth part, which was all that devolved, according to the laws of Russia, on her two daughters. Her avarice was as notorious as her wealth, and stories are told of her, that far out-do all that is related of the most famous misers. I will mention but one of them, the authenticity of which was warranted to me by an eye-witness.

Mr. Dantz, one of our friends, having had occasion to call on the countess, on matters of business, left his britchka in a court-yard of her house, in which there was some cattle. A large bundle of hay, intended for his horses, was hung behind the carriage, according to the usual custom in Russia. Being shown into a room that looked out into the court-yard, he became engaged in a brisk discussion with the countess, who would not yield to any of his arguments, and soon losing patience rose, as if to put an end to the interview, and walked to a window. But no sooner had she looked down into the court-yard than she again took up all the points of the discussion, one after the other, seeming half-disposed to yield, and keeping Mr. Dantz in suspense for more than a half an hour. Exceedingly puzzled by this sudden change in the lady's temper, which he knew not how to account for, he narrowly watched all her movements, and observed, that from time to time she cast a rapid glance into the court-yard; whereupon he went with affected carelessness to the window, and what did he see? Two or three horribly lean cows busily devouring the hay behind his carriage. The countess had prolonged the interview in order to gain time for her cows to feed at her visiter's expense; and, accordingly, as soon as the last blade of hay was eaten up, she resumed all her stateliness, cut short the discussion with a word, and gave Mr. Dantz his congé.

Odessa is a town of pleasure and luxury, where the ladies, it is said, ruin their husbands by their profusion and extravagant love of dress. In addition to the balls, concerts, and soirées of all sorts, performances for the benefit of the poor are given every year in the great theatre, by the *court*, as the Countess Voronzof's establishment is called. All the *élite* of Odessa, take part in these amusements, which bring in considerable sums. The countess at first set the example, by herself performing a part; but an order from the emperor forbade her thus exhibiting in public, and since that time she confines herself to the business of managing behind the curtain. The house is always well filled, and each performance brings in four or five thousand rubles. The skill displayed by these noble actors is not to be surpassed by any professional company; but this is not surprising, for every one knows in how high a degree the Russians possess the talent for imitation; whatever they see they mimic with ease, and without preparation. It is needless to add that the per-

performances are in French, and that the pieces are taken from our stock. M. Scribe is almost the sole contributor. Nowhere, perhaps, is our witty vaudevillist so much prized as in Russia.

Odessa possesses the only Italian theatre in Russia. The company is generally well composed, and gives, during the whole year, performances, which are but scantily attended, notwithstanding the passionate admiration which the Odessians affect for Italian music. It is only in the bathing season, when the Poles fill the town, that the house presents a somewhat more animated appearance. All the rest of the year the boxes are almost deserted, and the Jews alone frequent the pit. In 1840, Mademoiselle Georges entered into a six months' engagement with the manager of the Odessa theatre, and arrived with a numerous company, including some really superior actors. Yet, notwithstanding her European celebrity and her ample *repertoire*, she would scarcely have covered her expenses, but for the strenuous exertions of her quondam admirer, General N., who welcomed her as though fifteen years had not interrupted their liaison, and placed his mansion, his equipages, his purse, and his credit, at her disposal, with all the chivalric gallantry of a Russian magnifico.

But all his efforts were unable to reverse the very unfavourable sentence which public opinion had, from the first, pronounced upon his protégé. Notwithstanding the superior talent with which she still plays certain parts, she was appreciated but by a very small number of persons; and she left Odessa with sentiments of deep disdain for a public that so much preferred the paltriest vaudeville to all her bursts of passion as to make almost open war upon her. A thing till then almost unheard-of in Russia took place at the last performance of the French company: a regular cabal was formed, attended with an explosion of very stormy passions. The whole town was divided into two factions, the one for Mademoiselle Georges, the other for M. Montdidier, one of her best actors. Our tragedy queen, it is said, was exceedingly jealous of this preference, and lost no opportunity of mortifying her rival. Accordingly, she purposely selected for the last performance, two pieces in which he had no part. The public, greatly dissatisfied at not seeing the name of their favourite actor in the bills, repaired to the theatre in an ill-humour, of which they soon gave very intelligible symptoms. Things passed off, however, tolerably well until the end of the last piece; but then there was a call for Montdidier, which was taken up, and vehemently sustained by the whole pit, notwithstanding all the efforts of the police, General N's coterie, and the presence of the governor-general. This incident which had been altogether unforeseen by the managers, caused them extreme perplexity; no one knew where Montdidier was to be found. At last, seeing the row increase, Count Voronzof himself ordered the commissioner of police to go to Montdidier's hotel, and fetch him alive or dead. The commissioner found him fast asleep, and quite unconscious of all the agitation he was causing in the theatre. He hurried thither, and was proceeding to show himself on

the stage, but was stopped by the whole company with Mademoiselle Georges at their head, under pretext that such a course would be an infraction of all the rules of the theatre. In short, there was, for a while, an indescribable tumult. The whole pit stood up and never ceased shouting until they saw Montdidier rush on the stage, with his dress in a state of disorder that showed what a hard battle he had sustained behind the scenes. The angry shouts were now succeeded by an explosion of applause; the boxes rang with prolonged bravos, and even Count Voronzof himself was seen clapping his hands and laughing with all his might. The whole audience seemed to have lost their wits. General N., quite disconcerted, slunk back into the rear of his box, and said to one of his friends as he pointed to the stage, "Look at those Frenchmen; they have only to show themselves to upset all established usages and principles. They bring with them disorder, rebellion, and the spirit of revolution; and the contagion soon spreads even among the most sensible people." In truth nothing of the kind had ever before been seen in Odessa; and all the jealousies of the *prémisse* *donne* had never caused the twentieth part of the confusion that marked that memorable night.

## CHAPTER IV.

COMMERCE OF THE BLACK SEA—PROHIBITIVE SYSTEM AND ITS PERNICIOUS RESULTS—DEPRESSED STATE OF AGRICULTURE—TRADE OF ODESSA—ITS BANK.

FROM the destruction of the Genoese colonies in the Crimea, in 1476, down to the treaty of Kainardji, a period of 300 years, the Black Sea remained closed against the nations of the West, and was the privileged domain of Turkey. Its whole coast belonged to the sultans of Constantinople, and the khans of the Crimea. The Turks, and the Greeks of the Archipelago, subjects of the Ottoman Porte, had the sole right of navigating those waters, and all the commerce of Europe with that portion of the East was exclusively in the hands of the latter people. The conquests of Peter the Great, and subsequently those of the celebrated Catherine II., changed this state of things. The Russians advanced towards the south, and soon made themselves masters of the Sea of Azof, the Crimea, and all the northern coasts of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, it was not until July 21, 1774, after six consecutive campaigns, and many victories achieved by the Russians, by sea and land, that the treaty of Kainardji was signed, which by throwing open the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, effected a real revolution in the commercial relations of Europe, and definitively secured to Russia that immense influence which it exercises to this day over the destinies of the East. The treaty of Kainardji ere long received a

more ample extension. Austria, France, and successively all the other powers, partook in the advantages of the Black Sea navigation. Russia was, therefore, justly entitled to the gratitude of Europe, for the new channels she had opened to its commerce.

Once mistress of the Black Sea, and free to communicate with the Mediterranean, Catherine earnestly applied herself to the foundation of a port, which should be at once military and commercial. The mouth of the Dniepr, one of the largest rivers of Russia, at first attracted her attention. General Hannibal founded the town of Kherson upon it, in 1788, by her orders; and in 1783, a Frenchman, afterwards ennobled by Louis XVI., established the first foreign commercial house there, and contracted to supply the arsenals of Toulon with the hemp and timber conveyed down the Dniepr. Kherson, however, did not prosper as might have been expected. The empress's intentions were defeated by the exigencies of the system of customs prevailing in the empire, and it was impossible to obtain for the port of Kherson the franchises so necessary for a new town, and for the extension of its commerce.

The dismemberment of Poland gave a new turn to Catherine's commercial ideas. The port of Kherson was abandoned, or nearly so, in 1796, and the preference was given to Odessa, which, by its more western position, considerably facilitated the exportation of agricultural produce, wherein consisted the chief wealth of the palatinates of Podolia, Volhynia, and the other provinces newly incorporated with the Russian possessions. No change, however, was made in the system of customs, and it was not until 1803, in the reign of Alexander, that a reduction of one-fourth was made in the duties imposed by the general tariff on all exports and imports in the harbours of the Black Sea. In 1804, Odessa was made an entrepôt for sea-borne goods, the entrance of which was permitted into Russia. They might remain there in bond for eighteen months; a favour which was the more important at that period, because, as the import duties were considerable, the merchants would have been obliged to draw heavily on their capital, had they been obliged to defray them at once. An ukase of the 5th of March, in the same year, allowed transit, free of duty, to all foreign goods which were not prohibited in Odessa, or which arrived there from other towns of Russia; such goods if destined for Moldavia and Wallachia, were to pass through the custom-houses of Mohelef and Dubassar; for Austria, through those of Radzivilof; for Prussia, through those of Kezinsky; and foreign goods sent through these four establishments to Odessa, were allowed free transit thence by sea. These liberal and very enlightened arrangements vastly augmented the prosperity of Odessa, and soon attracted the attention of all speculators to that port.

About the year 1817 an increased duty was laid on all foreign goods in the Black Sea; but at the same period Odessa was definitively declared to be a free port, without restriction. Things con-

tinued thus until 1822; and it was during this interval that all those great foreign houses were established in Odessa, some of which exist to this day. The commerce of Southern Russia had then reached its apogee. After the long wars of the French empire the agriculture of Europe was in a very depressed condition, and it was necessary to have recourse to Russia for the corn which other countries could not raise in sufficient quantity for their own subsistence. Odessa thus became, under the wise administration of the Duc de Richelieu, one of the most active commercial cities of eastern Europe; its population increased prodigiously; the habits induced by prosperity gave a new stimulus to its import trade, and every year hundreds of vessels entered its port to take in agricultural freights of all kind.

Dazzled by this commercial prosperity, till then unexampled in Russia, and, doubtless believing it unalterably established, the government then chose to return to its prohibitive system, and, whether through ignorance or incapacity, the ministry deliberately ruined with their own hands the commercial wealth of Southern Russia. In 1822, at the moment when it was least expected, an ukase suppressed the freedom of the port of Odessa, and made it obligatory on the merchants to pay the duties on all goods then in the warehouses. This excited intense alarm, and as it was totally impossible to pay immediately such enormous duties as those imposed by the general tariff of the empire, the merchants remonstrated earnestly and threatened, all of them, to commit bankruptcy. The governor of the town, dismayed at the disasters which the enforcement of the law would occasion, took it on his own responsibility to delay; and commissioners were sent to St. Petersburg to acquaint the emperor with the state of commerce in Odessa. Alexander, whose intentions were always excellent, and who had no doubt been deceived by false reports, promptly annulled the ukase. The freedom of the port of Odessa was therefore re-established, but not to the same extent as before. Concessions were made to the board of customs, a fifth of the duties exacted in other Russian ports was imposed on goods entering Odessa, and the other four-fifths were to be paid on their departure for the interior. The limits of the free port were also considerably reduced, and two lines of custom-houses were formed, the one round the port, the other round the town. These lines still subsist.

The victories of the board of customs did not stop here, and new measures, suggested and supported no doubt by fraud, were put in force. We have spoken of the free transit traffic through the towns of Doubassar, Radzivilov, and Odessa. This traffic was increasing rapidly; all the merchants of western Asia were beginning to take the Odessa route to make their purchases in the great fairs of Germany. There was every probability that Odessa would be one of the principal points of arrival and exchange for all the produce of Europe and Asia. The Transcaucasian provinces enjoyed very extensive commercial freedom at this period by virtue of an ukase promulgated, October 20, 1821. Redoutkalé, at the mouth of the Phasis, on the shores

of Mingrelia, was then the port to which all the goods from Leipsic were conveyed by sea; from thence they passed to Tiflis and Erivan, and were then distributed over all the adjacent countries, through Turkey, Armenia, and even as far as Persia. The Armenians had secured this traffic almost exclusively to themselves. They appeared for the first time in Odessa in 1823. The next year they advanced as far as Leipsic, where they bought European manufactures to the amount of more than 600,000 francs; in 1825 their purchases rose to 1,200,000 francs, and in 1826 to 2,800,000. All these goods were conveyed by land to Odessa, and there embarked on the Black Sea for Redoutkaleh. It may easily be conceived what a happy influence such a traffic would have exercised over the agriculture and cattle rearing of Southern Russia, and eventually on the prosperity of the population engaged in this carrying trade. But all these promising elements of prosperity were to be annihilated by the narrow views of the minister of finance. The commercial franchise of the Caucasian provinces, after having lasted for ten years, was suddenly suppressed on the first of January, 1832. The most rigorous prohibitive system was put in force; Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, more than 220 miles from the Black Sea, was made the centre of the customs administration, and all goods destined for that part of Asia had to pass through that town to be examined there and pay duty.

By these arbitrary and exclusive measures, the government thought to encourage native manufactures; and by prohibiting the goods of Germany, France, and England, it hoped to force the productions of Russia on the trans-Caucasian provinces. The transit trade was, of course, proscribed at the same period. By a first ukase, the merchants were forced to deposit at the frontier in Radzivilof, double the value of their goods, and the money was only to be returned to them at Odessa, upon verification of their bales. It is obviously not to be thought of that merchants, however wealthy, should carry with them, in addition to the capital to be expended on their purchases, double the value of their goods *in transitu*. This new measure, therefore, was sufficient of itself alone to put an entire stop to the transit trade. The Persians and Armenians forsook this route, and chose another, to the great detriment of Russia. At present the value of the transit is from 180,000 to 200,000 francs, the goods being chiefly yellow amber, sent from Prussia to Turkey. For a charge of fifteen francs per twenty kilogrammes, the Jews undertake to give security to the customs in title-deeds, which they hire at the rate of five or six per cent., and they despatch the goods directly to Odessa.

England, always so prompt to seize opportunities, took advantage of the blunders of Russia. She secured a position in Trebizond, and her merchants, recoiling from no sacrifice, formed there an immense entrepôt, from which they soon sent out the manufactures of their country into all the provinces of Asia. Business to the amount of more than 2,000,000*l.* sterling, is now carried on in Trebizond, and two sets of steamboats ply between it and Constantinople.

Thus Russia lost one of the most important commercial lines in the world, and by her extravagant increase of duties she completely extinguished the lawful import trade of the Caucasian provinces. But English and other foreign goods still find their way there by contraband, and the government officers are themselves the first to profit by this system; for they are still more desirous than the native inhabitants to procure manufactured goods, and, above all, at a moderate price. The prohibitive measures of Russia have, therefore, really recoiled on the government itself, and the treasury loses considerably by them, not only in the Caucasus, but also on the European frontiers. Owing to the freedom of its port, the town of Odessa, of course, suffers less from the disastrous effects of this prohibitive system, and finds some commercial resources in its own consumption, and in that of its environs. Nevertheless, as this consumption, (which notwithstanding the contraband trade is kept in full vigour by the Jews, and even by the highest classes,) is out of all proportion to the exportation, and as there is very little exchange traffic, foreign vessels are gradually deserting the Black Sea; and, besides this, their charges for freight are necessarily too high, in consequence of their being obliged in almost every instance to repair in ballast to the harbours of South Russia. Then we must take into account the remoteness of the Black Sea; the dread, not yet quite effaced, with which it is regarded; the impossibility of finding freights anywhere except in Odessa; the excessive severity of the winter, and the usual obstructions of the harbours by ice during three or four months every year. All these things combine to repel mariners; so that nothing, except extraordinary cheapness and great profits, could induce merchants to send their vessels for freight to the ports of Southern Russia.

Thus driven away by the prohibitive system of Russia, many nations are seeking to establish markets for their productions elsewhere. It is also to be remarked that agriculture has made very great progress in Europe since the re-establishment of peace; and consequently the exportation of corn from Russia has considerably diminished. Nevertheless, we are of opinion that Southern Russia would have lost little of its agricultural importance, notwithstanding its system of customs, if the government, instead of remaining stationary, had sincerely entered on a course of improvement.

All circumstances seem to combine in New Russia to make the productions of the soil as economical as possible, and to enable them to compete successfully with those of all other countries. The soil is virgin and very abundant; labour is cheap and the price of cattle extraordinarily low; whilst serfdom, by obliging thousands of men to employ at least half their time for the benefit of their lords, ought naturally to tend to diminish the price of bread stuffs. Unfortunately the means of communication have been totally neglected, and the government has taken no steps to facilitate transport; in consequence of this the price of grain instead of falling is constantly increasing, and merchants are no longer willing to purchase except in

seasons of scarcity. The wheat sent to Odessa from Khivis, Volhynia, Podolia, and Bessarabia, arrives in carts drawn by oxen. The journeys are tedious, the extreme rate of travelling being not more than fifteen miles a day; and they are costly, for the carriage of a tchetvert or seven bushels of corn varies from four to six rubles; moreover, the transport can only be effected between May and September in consequence of the deplorable state of the roads during the other seven months of the year. The result of all this is that wheat, though very cheap in the provinces we have mentioned, is quoted at very high prices comparatively at Odessa, so as not to leave foreign speculators a sufficient profit to compensate for the length of the voyage to the Black Sea, the outlay of capital, and the enormous expenses caused by the quarantines to which many goods are subject. Besides this, Odessa is the only port that offers any facilities for commerce; Kherison situated in the midst of a fertile and productive region, is only a harbour of export, and its commerce cannot possibly extend; for the ships destined to take in freight at that port must previously perform quarantine in Odessa. All the landowners are therefore forced to send their produce to Odessa, if they would have any chance of sale. But, as we have already observed, the means of communication are everywhere wanting. It must, indeed, be owned that the construction of stone-faced roads is attended with great difficulty, for throughout all the plains of Southern Russia the materials, are scarce and for the most part of bad quality, being limestone of a friable character. But might not the produce of a great part of Poland, and of all new Russia, be conveyed to Odessa by the Pruth, the Dniestr, and the Dniepr?

The only goods conveyed down the Dniestr consist at present of some rafts of timber and firewood from the mountains of Austrian Galicia. The Russian government has repeatedly been desirous of improving the navigation of the river in compliance with the desire of the inhabitants of its banks. A survey was made in 1827, and again in 1840. Unfortunately all these investigations being made by men of no capacity led to nothing. An engineer was commissioned in 1829 to make a report on the works necessary for rendering the river practicable at Jampol, where it is obstructed by a small chain of granite. He estimated the expense at 185,000 francs, whereas it was secretly ascertained that 10,000 would be more than enough. The project was then abandoned. Thus with the best and most laudable intentions, the government is constantly crippled in its plans of amelioration whether by the incapacity or by the bad faith and cupidity of its functionaries. Last year the subject of the navigation of the Dniestr was again taken up, and it is even alleged that the Russian government has given orders for two steam-vessels destined to ply on that river.

The works on the Dniepr are scarcely in a more forward state than those of the Dniestr. It is known that below Iekaterinoslaf the course of the river is traversed by a granite chain, which ex-



tends between that town and Alexandrof, a distance of more than fifteen leagues. At the time of the conquest of the Crimea and the shores of the Black Sea, it was proposed to render navigable the thirteen rapids that form what has been improperly denominated the cataracts of the Dniepr. Works were begun at various times, but always abandoned. They were resumed under Nicholas with new ardour, but the government was soon discouraged by the enormous cost, and, above all, by the peculations of its servants. The whole amount of work done up to the present time is a wretched canal 300 yards long, more dangerous for barges to pass through than the rapids themselves. This canal was finished in 1838. The works had not yet been resumed when we left Russia in 1841. The rapids of the Dniepr are therefore still as impracticable as ever, and it is only during the spring floods, a period of a month or six weeks, that barges venture to pass them; and even then it rarely happens that they escape without accident. More than eighty men were lost in them in 1839, and a multitude of barges and rafts were knocked to pieces on the rocks. The goods that thus descend the Dniepr consist almost exclusively of timber and firewood, and Siberian iron. Corn never makes any part of the cargo, because in case of accident it would be lost beyond recovery. But what will really seem incredible is, that the German colonists settled below the rapids, are obliged to convey their produce to the Sea of Azov in order to find any market for it; hence the greater part of the government of Iekaterinoslaf, and those of Poltava and Tchernikof, watered by the Dniepr, are in a perpetual state of distress, though they have wheat in abundance; and the peasants sunk into the deepest wretchedness, are compelled every year to make journeys of 300 miles, and often more, to earn from six to seven francs a month in the service of the landowners on the borders of the Black Sea. The eastern part of the government of Iekaterinoslaf profits by the vicinity of the Sea of Azov, and tries to dispose of its corn in Taganrok, Marioupol, and Berdiansk, a port newly established by Count Voronzof.

This general survey of the means of transport possessed by Russia,